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IAB, GRAB & STAB!

By Mike Everyman

Photos by Ichiro Nagata

Knife fighting lessons from
the war in Sudan.

Friday, 26 July, 2002. Location: 8 kilometers southwest of Wangkai, Upper Nile Region, Sudan.

Sergeant Kiir slowly lowered his head back into the meager sniper hide, simultaneously motioning to his sniper teammate, Sgt. Samuel, that he saw two enemy Islamic soldiers approaching their hill from the northeast. Samuel's usually impassive face registered the news with a look of shocked disbelief.

His hairline wrinkled as he raised his eyes to peek carefully over the rim of the hide-site, the lateral scars across his forehead folding in consternation. The ceremonial scars identified him as a member of the Sudanese Nuer tribe.

To his horror, two National Islamic Front (NIF) soldiers were tramping straight up the hill with a demeanor that could only be described as reckless abandon: one was carrying a radio pack while the other was toting an antennae and a solar panel. They were heading to the hilltop to set up a communications station, which could mean only one thing—a major troop movement massing for an attack.

JAB, GRAB & STAB!

A thick column of dust along the main road to Wangkai confirmed his suspicions. As senior member of the sniper team, Samuel had to make a decision in a hurry. The south slope of the hill was rife with Chinese Type 69 bounding fragmentation mines with a field of Egyptian T 79 blast mines at the base. If they retreated in that direction they would be caught in the open and killed or, worse still, captured.

It would be simple enough to shoot the two interlopers, but the still air would carry the report of their gunshots to the rapidly approaching troops below, and bring the full measure of their wrath down on the two Sudanese Peoples Liberation Army (SPLA) snipers' heads. They desperately needed to buy time to escape.

Sgt. Samuel pulled his knife and motioned for Kiir to do the same. Minutes later

they charged the two Arab soldiers, catching them completely by surprise. The encounter was brief, bloody and mercifully silent.

The two sergeants were able to warn some of the local Christian civilians of the upcoming attack by Islamic forces. Unfortunately their worst fears were realized. Helicopter gunships, Antonov bombers, NIF soldiers and even Arab tribesmen on horses descended on the helpless local population. Three days later an

estimated 1,500 Christian and animist civilians lay dead: the latest victims of Islamic Sudan's Jihad, or Holy War, against non-Muslims.

In addition, over 400 civilians, mostly women and children, were captured, presumably to be sold into slavery. This is the hell of modern-day Sudan.

Blade Intensive War

In these days of smart bombs and laser guided missiles, edged weapon combat is very rare indeed, and the few tales of daring-do with a blade are typically anecdotal at best and apocryphal at worst. Most knife fighting stories you hear are characterized by a dearth of documented, useful information.

An exception to this is the war in Sudan, which is the bloodiest war on the African continent, and second only to the conflict in Rwanda in its blade-intensiveness. Many practical lessons have been learned over the years, some of them at great cost. We'll take a look at some of the crucial ones, but first, let's talk about what happens to the human body in combat, and how we can use its involuntary reactions to our advantage.

ARIES is an acronym for Autonomic Response In Extreme Stress. In combat, our body prepares itself for fight-or-flight by dumping plenty of adrenaline and draining blood from our extremities to be used by our



The author has trained Sudanese freedom fighters in the arts of war, including his "jab, grab and stab" knife fighting techniques. Here two members of the Nuer tribe demonstrate a basic jab to the eyes followed by an ice pick grip stab.

vital organs and major muscle groups.

This means that our large muscle group strength is enhanced, but our fine motor skills become severely attenuated. Combatants report feeling clumsy, trembling and being terrified. They often want to barf and soil themselves, and it is all they can do to hold onto their blade. Keep this in mind the next time you are practicing twirling your blade or doing

fine motor, intricate drills.

Keep your guard high, protecting your head and neck. The enemy's eyes and throat are your primary targets and, conversely, the most critical areas for you to protect.

Keep your strong side to the rear and stand in a basic combat crouch. When you're fighting for your life, you will instinctively crouch down anyway, so you might as well train that way. Ernie Emerson of Emerson Knives has long taught his blade fighting system which centers around boxing-style footwork. Students have often remarked on how quick and efficient it is to learn and implement. The SPLA agrees.

Point your blade at the enemy's eyes. He will automatically focus on your weapon once he

The author's anonymity is important in his line of work—his name is not "Mike Everyman"—but his blade designs are real. They're all available at www.mercworx.com and include the Orion folder and the Sniper fixed blade.





Demonstrating the author's basic fighting stance, these Sudanese warriors keep their hands and arms up to protect the neck and face.



The double recurved blade style is the author's favorite, the bigger the better. These Merovorx knives include, from top to bottom, the Vorax, Sniper and Equatorian.



sees it, so the ancient sword fighting technique of pointing it at his eyes gives him a foreshortened view of your weapon, making it harder for him to react quickly when you set your blade in motion.

Yank And Shank

Keviri McClung, a blade expert and designer of Mad Dog Knives who is also an accomplished knife fighter, likes to say, "Yank and shank." My concept of jab, grab and stab is the same.

Jab with your lead hand, just as you would in boxing. Your targets are the eyes and throat. The typical reaction to this is for your enemy to lift his arms to protect his face. This is when you grab him with that jabbing hand and pull him toward you, or you toward him, whichever the case may be.

Now it's time to stab. Thrust quickly and savagely, over and over. Pump the blade into him repeatedly with all your might until he collapses. If his neck is open, go straight for it.

If the neck isn't open, stab his groin, kidneys or rectum to bring his hands down, then go for the throat. Don't expect it to be rhythmic clean and pretty like a choreographed scene between Steven Segal and Tommy Lee Jones.

A fight for your life is staccato, jerky and horrifying. Don't kid yourself, it's brutal and bloody. You must be committed to win an edged engagement. Mick Strider, an accomplished martial artist in his own right, says, "Stab it through his spine from the front."

Train For Real

When you train, practice holding your knife in both a saber grip and an ice pick grip. How you grab your knife is how you will use it: you probably won't have the time or luxury to reseat the knife in your hand the way you want to, and if you do it will just be an opportunity for your shaky, fumbling fingers to drop it. Grab it and hold on for dear life.

Use as many universal techniques as possible. Just as you have the same basic stance for CQB with a rifle, MP5, handgun, knife and bare hands, you want techniques that will work with as many different weapons as possible, including bare hands.

Repeated stabs to the neck and kidneys with an ice pick grip readily trans-

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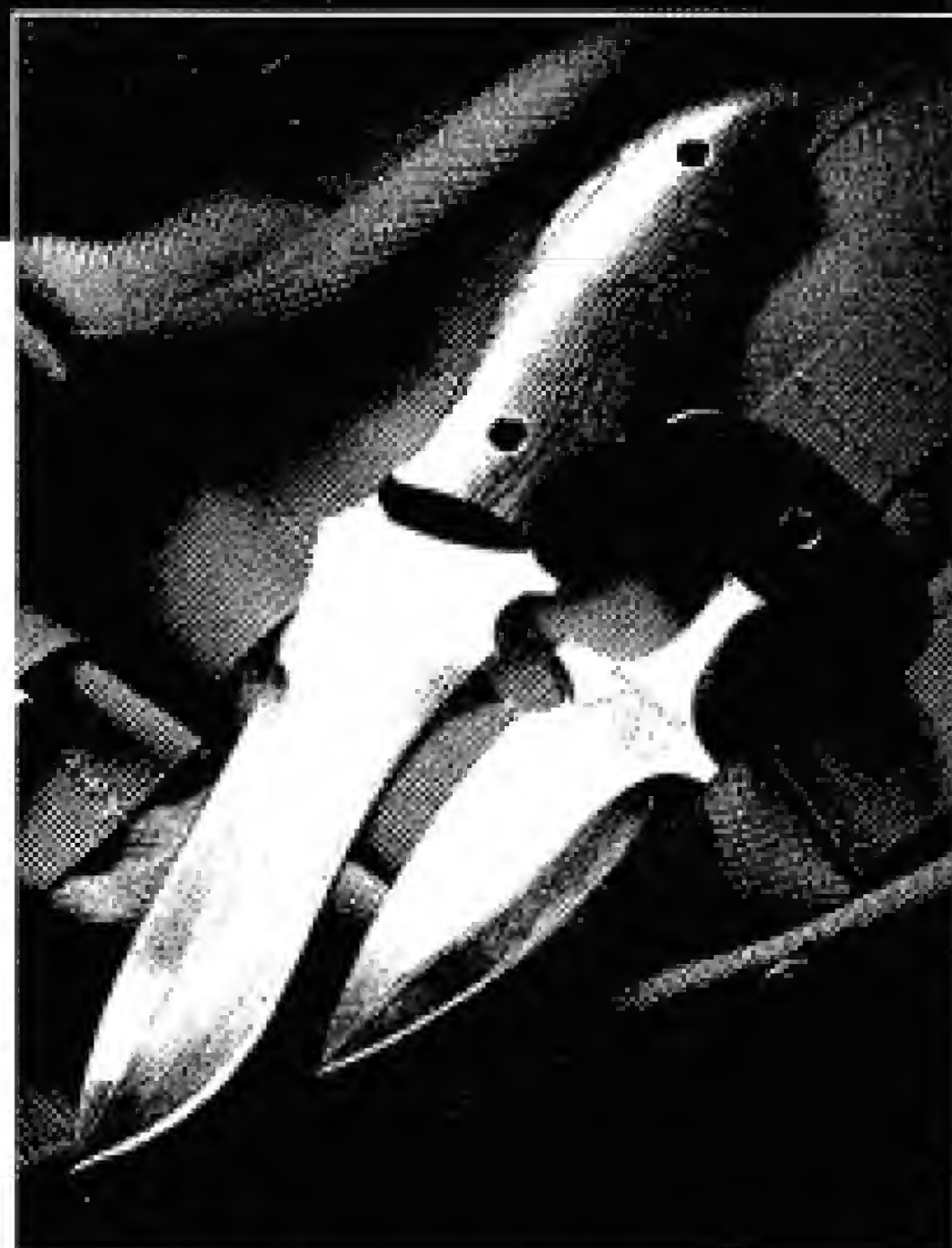
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The Galgotha, left, is the shortest blade of the double recurve family (see previous page for the rest) while the Seraphym is a double edged push dagger. For more information about the war in Sudan where these knives have been employed against Islamic terrorists, check out the author's website www.graymanknives.com.

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late to blows to the same targets with a bare handed hammer fist, which in turn adapts to strikes with a bottle, stick, SureFire light, pen or rock. Saber grip techniques adapt readily to palm heels, hand slashes and so on.

In general, train to stab more than slash. This doesn't mean that slashes are ineffective—far from it. However, deep stabs are usually quicker to incapacitate a foe than slashes, and stabbing motions will work better with a wider variety of make-shift weapons.

If you have the choice of a big blade or a small one, keep in mind that a larger blade gives you a deep, wide wound channel that is likely to damage more vital organs, cut more arteries and allow more air in, which consequently lets more blood out.

If you have to slash, some of the larger knives are absolutely devastating hackers. Just remember that if you are training to slash, you will have to revert to stabbing techniques if you find yourself *in extremis* with nothing but a large screwdriver in your hand.

Credited to old school boxers, this saying applies to virtually all forms of combat—the firstest with the mostest wins. If you ever have to cross the combat Rubicon like so many of the freedom fighters in the Sudan have done, stab fast, stab furious and most importantly—stab first.

